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AICA, Havana, Cuba

New Utopias: Memory, Art, and Context
11-15 October 2016

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Paper title: New Feminist Activism: Memory, Art, and Context

ABSTRACT

It is possible to find online the original Pathé footage of Emily Wilding Davison stepping into the path of the king's horse at the Epsom Derby, England, 1913. She lifts an object in her hand; the horse hits her, throwing her into the air, and she falls to the ground, unmoving. Four days later she died of her injuries. The object she held was a scarf embroidered in the suffragette colours of green, purple and white: 'Votes For Women'. Her tombstone carries the motto of the Women's Social and Political Union: *Deeds Not Words*. Recent forensic film analysis shows that Davison deliberately positioned her action in relation to three film cameras, and suggesting that therefore her action can be read as a foundational performance to camera of activism. Where are the recent feminist performances of resistance? Examples might include Pussy Riot (Russia), Tanja Ostojić (Serbia), Xiao Lu (China), Sethembile Msezane (South Africa), Femen (Ukraine), and documentary photographs. Drawing on writers like Lippard, Mitchell and Groys, I discuss the performative activist subject, the distinction between political and activist art, and the differences between the intentionally-made object or intervention and the iconic but opportunistic image arising from events.